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Report of the Peacebuilding Commission mission to Sierra Leone

19-25 March 2007

I. Background

1. At its fifth meeting, on 21 February 2007, the Organizational Committee of the Peacebuilding Commission decided that the Commission would undertake field visits to Sierra Leone and Burundi. The mission to Sierra Leone took place from 19 to 25 March 2007. The nine-member delegation of the Commission was led by the Ambassador of the Netherlands, in his capacity as Chairman of the country-specific configuration on Sierra Leone, and included representatives of Angola, Brazil, China, Croatia, Egypt, Guinea, Ghana and India. The primary purposes of the mission were to (a) obtain first-hand information about the situation in Sierra Leone and assess challenges to peacebuilding, (b) discuss with the Government and other stakeholders gaps within priority areas for peacebuilding and the development of an integrated framework/strategy for peacebuilding and (c) communicate the main principles and purposes of the Peacebuilding Commission to stakeholders on the ground. The full terms of reference and composition of the mission are set out in the annex to the present report.

2. The primary message of the mission was the assurance that the engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission is for the medium term and is aimed at maintaining sustained international attention and support for Sierra Leone's efforts for sustainable peacebuilding. The Commission's efforts could include bringing together all relevant actors, marshalling resources and advising on integrated strategies for peacebuilding. An important outcome of the mission was an understanding and a commitment from the Sierra Leone Government on the next steps forward for the Commission's engagement with the country. The visit also reinforced the conviction that the Commission can play an important role in Sierra Leone, in particular in fostering greater dialogue and coordination among all stakeholders working on peace consolidation.

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3. The mission met with the President, the Vice-President, the Chief Justice, the Speaker of the Parliament, the President of the Special Court, cabinet ministers and members of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, as well as representatives of the major political parties, the United Nations, bilateral and multilateral partners, civil society and regional and subregional organizations. In addition to Freetown, the mission visited Makeni in the Northern Province and Kenema in the Eastern Province.

4. The members of the mission express appreciation to the Government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations team for their support and assistance during the visit.

II. General observations

5. Since the signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement in 1999, the Government and the people of Sierra Leone and international partners have made significant progress in rebuilding the country and securing peace. The Government, with support from the United Nations and other multilateral and bilateral partners, has developed a number of strategies for peace and development, such as Vision 2025, the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Peace Consolidation Strategy, the Improved Governance and Accountability Pact and the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The mission noted a growing awareness that those strategies and the Government's engagement with the international community need to result in concrete peace dividends for the people of Sierra Leone. Capacity-building and the availability of adequate resources were highlighted as critical in that regard.

6. The delegation noted a number of positive developments in the political sphere in Sierra Leone, for example, in relation to the openness of the political space, media freedom and freedoms of speech and association. Since the peaceful multiparty elections of 2002, there have been many signs of institutionalization of democratic practices, such as the creation of the Human Rights Commission and the commencement of a process of constitutional review. However a number of shortcomings remain to be addressed, such as the low participation rate of women in the political process, the limited role and capacity of the legislative branch and limited dialogue among political parties.

7. It was highlighted that political developments need to be matched by progress in the economic and social spheres. The majority of the population remains extremely insecure because of poverty, lack of access to justice, lack of employment opportunities, high crime rates and corruption. The situation is even more difficult for young people and women, who face additional marginalization and discrimination. Many of the root causes of conflict, such as lack of employment for the large youth population, the proliferation of small arms, inadequate State capacity to deliver basic services, corruption and instability in the region, persist today. The important role of the Peacebuilding Commission in supporting the national Government and other stakeholders in their continued efforts for peace consolidation was highlighted in this context.

8. The mission also observed a generally limited awareness among all partners in Sierra Leone about the work of the Peacebuilding Commission as separate from the Peacebuilding Fund. Many stakeholders in the country remain primarily focused on the disbursement of the $35 million allocated to Sierra Leone by the Peacebuilding Fund. The mission of the Peacebuilding Commission to Sierra Leone contributed to

clarifying the differences between the Commission and the Fund and that the Commission's engagement with Sierra Leone is for the medium rather than the short term and goes beyond resource mobilization. The mission stressed the need to ensure regular information flow between the Commission and stakeholders in Sierra Leone.

9. At the meeting with civil society representatives, the delegation was pleased to learn that a number of consultations have been organized by civil society groups in partnership with the Government and international actors to raise awareness about the work of the Commission and ensure the full participation of civil society in the process. The mission highlighted the need to build on this awareness-raising through capacity-building of civil society organizations and women's groups, especially in rural communities.

III. Key issues

Youth employment and empowerment

10. Youth unemployment was identified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as one of the root causes of the civil war and was widely noted to be a continued threat to peace consolidation. The Government defines youth as the group of persons between 15 and 35 years of age, which includes 2 million people out of a total population of about 5 million. Two thirds of the youth population is unemployed and largely marginalized from the political system, and lacks adequate education and training. Significantly, many of the dire conditions that gave rise to the conflict in 1991 remain in 2006, with many youths unemployed, marginalized and lacking hope for the future.

11. In a meeting with cabinet members, including the Minister of Youth and Sports, the mission learned of a number of ongoing initiatives to address the situation of young men and women. In response to the growing problem of youth unemployment, in November 2006 the Government launched a youth employment scheme aimed at generating up to 135,000 short-term jobs for young people. The Government has also developed a national youth plan to address not only the question of employment for young people but also their full participation in the political process and protection of their human rights. The Mano River Union and the United Nations teams in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire have also selected youth employment as one of the areas on which to focus their work.

12. The President, a number of senior officials and representatives of civil society underscored that in order to ensure sustainable employment for youth, there is a need for economic growth and private-sector development, the precondition for which is the availability of electricity, water and other basic infrastructure. It was also stressed that in order to ensure greater participation of youth, especially young women, in the political process and public life, there is a need for capacity-building and review of discriminatory practices and laws.

Good governance

13. Sierra Leone will hold presidential and parliamentary elections on 28 July 2007. A national referendum on amendments to the Constitution is also foreseen during the elections, based on the work of the Law Reform Commission. Those

elections represent an important milestone in the consolidation of peace in the country. A number of confidence-building and risk-reduction measures have been put in place in the lead-up to the elections by the Government of Sierra Leone, with the support of international partners, especially the United Nations, such as the Political Parties Code of Conduct, the Media Code of Conduct and support for the National Electoral Commission and the Political Parties Registration Commission.

14. Voter registration for the elections was undertaken over a period of 21 days in February and March. Over 2.6 million voters were registered, 49 per cent of them women. On the basis of the population census of 2004, the figures show that 91 per cent of those aged 18 and over have registered to vote. Election preparations appeared to be well on track. The delegation stressed the need to increase dialogue among political parties and build confidence among the general population in the electoral process and institutions such as the National Electoral Commission and the Political Parties Registration Commission. It was also noted that due attention should be given to post-election issues, such as the acceptance of election results.

15. In a number of meetings the delegation discussed issues of corruption. It was noted that according to the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, "endemic corruption was a central factor that produced the dire conditions that made civil war inevitable". There was a general sense that capacity-building efforts and a review of salary rates for public-service professionals should be undertaken as part of the anti-corruption work. The mission also stressed the need to provide additional support for the work of the Anti-Corruption Commission, which currently does not have the capacity to prosecute its own cases. Some of the development partners and civil society representatives noted that there was a growing perception among the population that the Anti-Corruption Commission is ineffective.

16. The mission also discussed an ongoing initiative undertaken by the Government of Sierra Leone and its partners in the area of good governance and strengthening accountability. In this context, the Improved Governance and Accountability Pact, signed in July 2006 by the Government and the four donors who provide direct budgetary support, was noted as a particularly important effort that requires further follow-up.

Justice sector and security sector reform

17. According to the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, failures in the justice system were one of the root causes of the conflict in Sierra Leone. A number of initiatives are under way to rebuild the institutions of justice in Sierra Leone and ensure access to justice for all. As part of the Justice Sector Development Programme, the Government has developed a national policy framework for the justice sector and a justice sector reform strategy for 2008-2010. However, the mission noted that in both the short and the medium term additional efforts are needed for legal reform, harmonization of customary and traditional justice, addressing the backlog of court cases, overcrowded conditions in the prisons and the low capacity of justice sector professionals.

18. In terms of security sector reform, the delegation was informed about many successful efforts, such as the professionalization and reduction in the size of the armed forces and completion of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. However, it was stressed that the living conditions of armed forces personnel remain poor and that 57 per cent of military personnel lack adequate

housing. Continued efforts are also needed for the reintegration of former combatants, especially child soldiers.

19. It was noted by Government representatives and a number of development partners that the reform of the police has to a large extent been successful. However, a number of actions are still needed, such as strengthening the family support units to address issues such as gender-based violence, enhancing police-community relations and capacity-building and training for the police, especially in the lead-up to the national and local elections in 2007 and 2008.

20. While visiting Kenema, the mission met with the local police chief and observed police training exercises for effective crowd control. This effort of the Government of Sierra Leone is being supported by the United Nations and the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DfID) in the lead-up to the national elections in July. During a visit to a district prison and a district-level magistrate court, the mission discussed short- and medium-term challenges of the justice sector, such as the need to harmonize traditional and customary laws and address the backlog of court cases.

Capacity-building

21. The delegation noted an overwhelming need for capacity-building in the Government, the national Parliament and civil society organizations. In the meeting with the Speaker of the Parliament it was noted that the Sierra Leone Parliament is heavily dependent on the central Government and lacks the basic capacity to perform its role as an independent branch of the Government. Additional efforts are also needed to build the capacity of the civil service and ensure a higher proportion of women and young people in the civil service through the proposed senior executive service reform.

Cross-cutting issues

22. In discussing peacebuilding priorities with various stakeholders, the delegation observed the recurrence of a number of cross-cutting issues, such as the need to address gender and human rights concerns and ensure basic levels of infrastructure and service provision. While meeting with members of the Human Rights Commission, the Peacebuilding Commission delegation expressed the hope that the Human Rights Commission would provide the needed follow-up and monitoring for the implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

23. In a meeting with civil society organizations, women's groups welcomed the setting up of the Constitutional Review Committee and called for the removal of section 27(4) (d) of the Sierra Leone Constitution, which exempts certain areas of the law, such as adoption, marriage and divorce, from protection against discrimination. The women's groups also stressed the need to support the newly created Human Rights Commission and expedite the consideration of the draft bills on domestic violence, on registration of customary marriages and divorce and on intestate succession in the Parliament.

24. All partners noted that energy is a prerequisite for development; without energy it would be impossible to attract foreign investment and develop sustainable economic opportunities for the population. The need to support the Government's

efforts in this area was stressed in almost every meeting. In particular, the Government representatives stressed the need to complete the Bumbuna hydroelectric project in late 2007. Financing for the completion of that project has been envisaged to be on commercial terms; however, negotiations between the Government and the contractor have not yet been completed, and the outcome is uncertain.

Regional dimensions of peace consolidation

25. The Peacebuilding Commission delegation met with the Secretary-General of the Mano River Union and discussed the need to strengthen and revitalize its capacity to address cross-border issues such as refugees, the proliferation of small arms, criminal activity, smuggling of resources and remaining border disputes. The Secretary-General noted that the Mano River Union seriously lacks capacity to be able to adequately address important regional issues relevant to peace consolidation in Sierra Leone and the broader region. The delegation stressed that subregional dimensions of peace consolidation are critical and need to be fully reflected in the Commission's work on Sierra Leone.

International support for the peacebuilding efforts of Sierra Leone

26. A number of bilateral and multilateral partners have been assisting the Government of Sierra Leone in peace consolidation and development. The mission learned that development assistance to Sierra Leone in 2006 amounted to $286 million, which represented a slight increase from 2005 and represented 30 per cent of the national budget. Development assistance is given in a variety of forms, including direct budget support, balance of payments assistance, support for programmes and projects and assistance given through non-governmental organizations and the various United Nations agencies. Four donors — the European Commission, DfID, the African Development Bank and the World Bank — provide a significant percentage of their assistance as direct budgetary support through a multi-donor budgetary support framework.

27. The Government established the Development Partnership Committee in 2003 to monitor the implementation of the benchmarks in the poverty reduction strategy paper and provide coordination for donor assistance. However, additional efforts are needed to enhance donor-Government coordination and dialogue. It was noted during the mission that some bilateral donors have withdrawn or significantly decreased their contributions, especially in the area of good governance. On the other hand, the Government expressed the view that the donors are not sensitive to the special needs of Sierra Leone as a post-conflict country with limited capacity to implement projects and report on some of the benchmarks. The Peacebuilding Commission could play a critical role in strengthening dialogue between the Government and its international partners as well as broadening the donor base in Sierra Leone.

28. The absence of a clear national policy on aid coordination was highlighted as a constraining factor for effective aid coordination. The need to develop such a policy in order to promote effective resource mobilization and allocation, strengthen dialogue among donor partners and the Government and uphold mutual accountability was stressed by the Sierra Leone Government and development partners. The delegation noted that the groundwork for an aid policy had begun in

late 2006 and that there was a growing commitment to complete a full aid policy by the end of 2007.

Recommendations and next steps for the Peacebuilding Commission

29. The mission and the Government of Sierra Leone agreed on the need to develop an integrated strategic framework for the Peacebuilding Commission's medium-term engagement with the country. That framework will clearly outline the commitments of the Government of Sierra Leone and the international community. The delegation stressed that the development of the framework will be firmly vested with the Sierra Leone Government, supported by the United Nations, civil society and multilateral and bilateral partners through a consultative process. The framework will be used to assess progress and ensure follow-up to agreed commitments. It could also support additional resource mobilization and ensure sustained international attention for Sierra Leone's peacebuilding process.

30. It was agreed that the integrated strategic framework for peacebuilding will build on and strengthen existing frameworks, such as the poverty reduction strategy paper and the peace consolidation strategy, rather than replace them. It will highlight critical peacebuilding priorities from those documents and increase the coherence of both the United Nations system and bilateral actors in addressing them.

31. The mission further clarified that the Commission's process of articulating a framework with Sierra Leone will not be directly linked to the Peacebuilding Fund disbursement, although Fund priorities will be covered broadly by the framework. The framework will govern the medium-term relationship between the Commission and Sierra Leone and will therefore extend beyond the role of the Peacebuilding Fund in providing an immediate and short-term response to peacebuilding challenges.

32. The upcoming meetings of the Peacebuilding Commission on Sierra Leone were also discussed, and it was noted that there was a need to hold two informal meetings, one on youth employment and the other on capacity-building, in May. Those meetings would provide an opportunity to learn more about the challenges and initiatives in those peacebuilding priority areas. It was also agreed that a formal, country-specific meeting on Sierra Leone would take place in early May in order to discuss the first draft of an integrated peacebuilding framework.

Annex

Terms of reference and composition of the Peacebuilding Commission delegation to Sierra Leone

1. The Organizational Committee of the Peacebuilding Commission, at its fifth meeting, on 21 February 2007, decided that the Commission would make field visits to Sierra Leone and Burundi. The visit to Sierra Leone would take place from 19 to 25 March 2007.

Terms of reference

2. The mission has the following objectives:

(a) Obtain first-hand information about the situation on the ground and assess challenges to peacebuilding;

(b) Discuss with the Government and other stakeholders priority areas for peacebuilding, the development of an integrated framework for peacebuilding and how the Commission can best support national peacebuilding efforts;

(c) Focus the attention of the international community on peacebuilding efforts in Sierra Leone and communicate the main principles and purposes of the Commission.

Composition

3. The Organizational Committee decided that the participants in the field visit would be chosen on a regional basis, one representative from each of the five regional groups, plus one representative from among the non-members of the Organizational Committee participating in the country-specific meetings and the Chairmen of the country-specific meetings.

4. The delegation to Sierra Leone will include:

Frank Majoor (Netherlands) (head of mission)
Tete Antonio (Angola)
Piragibe dos Santos Tarragô (Brazil)
Wenju Cheng (China) (Ambassador to Sierra Leone)
Amir Muharemi (Croatia)
Mahmoud Yehia Ezzat (Egypt) (Ambassador to Sierra Leone)
Leslie Christian (Ghana)
Alpha Ibrahima Sow (Guinea)
Amarendra Khatua (India) (Ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire)
Bartjan Wegter (Netherlands)
Ejeviome Eloho Otobo (Peacebuilding Support Office)
Vina Nadjibulla (Peacebuilding Support Office)

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1. Draft Sierra Leone Integrated Peacebuilding Strategy.
2. Update on the preparations for the Presidential and Parliamentary elections to be held on 11 August 2007.
3. Other matters.

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